



Ring Pink Mussel



Interior and exterior of a Ring Pink Mussel's shell.



The Green River

Species Recovery Status

Current Status

The ring pink mussel is critically endangered and may even be functionally extinct in the wild. Within the last five years, mussel researchers located two individuals in the Green River near Munfordville, Kentucky.

Recovery Actions

It is possible this species could be prevented from almost certain extinction if enough individuals are obtained from the Green River in Kentucky to allow for successful propagation efforts. A segment of the river is believed to still harbor an extremely small population of this species. As a result of special funding for recovery of listed species that was obtained from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, an intensive search to locate the species will be directed by

Dr. Monte McGregor of the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources (KDFWR) in the Green River. Any individuals located will be held in a mussel propagation facility operated by the KDFWR in Frankfort, Kentucky. If efforts to collect this species are successful and if juveniles can be propagated, the individuals may one day be released back into the Green River and/or other suitable streams, which would be the beginning of increased recovery efforts for this species and possibly prevent its extinction.

Information about the Species

Scientific name: *Obovaria retusa* (Lamarck, 1819)

Description

Adults are about three or four inches in length and height. Their shell is thick and ovate in outline. The exterior of the shell lacks rays and has a yellow-green to brown-black color which is usually darker in older individuals. The inside, or nacre, of the shell is a salmon to deep purple color surrounded by a white border.

Life History and Ecology

Found in large rivers, the ring pink inhabits gravel bars in shallow waters. The species is long lived, perhaps living 50 years or more. Little else is known about this species; however, it is a filter feeder likely feeding on detritus, diatoms, phytoplankton, and zooplankton. Most native mussels require a fish host to complete a portion of their life cycle; however, the fish host for the ring pink is not known.

Range

The species was federally-listed as endangered on September 29, 1989 (54 Federal Register 40109). It was once historically widespread in the Ohio River and its larger tributaries in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Alabama. Extremely small populations may still occur in small segments of the Tennessee River downstream of Wilson Dam, Pickwick Landing Dam, and Kentucky Dam, the Cumberland River near Hartsville, Tennessee, the Kanawha River in West Virginia, and a small segment of the Green River in Kentucky.

Most historically known ring pink populations were apparently lost due to the conversion of rivers into large impoundments, changing the free flowing streams in which they occurred and the fish communities of those streams. Current threats primarily result from the ring pink's restricted range, small population numbers, and its apparent inability to recruit individuals into populations. As a result, the ring pink is believed to be functionally extinct in the wild.